It’s been very quiet in Dubai with the holidays although I shudder to think what turn the traffic might take come September, despite the looming threat of higher fuel charges. In the meantime, this last month, we’ve been scrambling to get you all the figures about which programmes fared well during Ramadan and whether genre appeal has shifted since last year. At the same time, we have seen a spate of new OTT players enter the market and the competition is getting heated up now or then again, are all of them offering the same menu? Chris O’Hearn, who heads the Emirates Media Measurement project, suggests that period dramas and other historical series took a backseat this year, unlike in previous years while comedy reigned supreme.

It looks like Ramez Wakel Al Gaw had everyone in splits, while an old favourite, Bab al Hara, had to settle for second place. Six of the top ten programmes for Arabs this year were either animation or comedy, according to Chris. But I won’t divulge all the surprises here. It’s best to read what he has to say in his column and how social media is helping the cause.

On a different note, we have witnessed a deluge of streaming options in the region, with more services and payment offerings on the cards. However, most of them focus on Hollywood fare and sceptics wonder if this is truly the way to go in the Middle East, where viewers are beginning to demand more Arabic content.

What’s the way forward? Can OTT players identify key differentiators that will fortify their position in this market when the likes of Netflix come in? Karim Sarkis, our guest columnist this month, discusses this in detail and offers a few suggestions to regional OTT players.
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Starz Play offers prepaid cards, ties with Ooredoo

Streaming service Starz Play has rolled out prepaid subscription cards in the UAE with plans to gradually introduce them in Saudi Arabia and other MENA markets in the coming months, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. The prepaid cards, available for three, six, and 12-month subscription periods, can be bought from the Starz Play website or leading retailers.

Maaz Sheikh, President of Starz Play, stated that the cards offer an alternative payment method to avail of the company’s streaming service. “There is an acknowledged reluctance to online payments by some consumers. Some do not have access to credit cards while others have a trust deficit to the online process and still others may have cultural barriers that prevent their adoption and use of credit cards. As our monthly subscription is just $12.99, it makes sense to offer a simple and convenient alternative method for these customers,” he said. Similar cards from Netflix are already in use in the US and European markets.

Starz Play has also partnered with Ooredoo TV in the GCC. Ooredoo is the first company in the region to announce a partnership with the streaming service, which will provide exclusive rights to show more than 3,500 hours of programmes, on-demand content and movies for customers. The service will be available via Ooredoo’s next-generation Mozaic service and Mozaic GO app in Qatar by the end of the year.

Ooredoo Group is also in talks with Starz Play to introduce an operator billing framework for some markets. This will give customers the option to pay their weekly and monthly subscription for unlimited content via their Ooredoo account.

Khaled Al-Jamal has joined Irdeto as Sales Director and will head the company’s MENA operations, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. As part of his remit, Al-Jamal is responsible for growing the company’s sales efforts in the MENA region and supporting the efforts of regional networks to fight piracy. Alongside Al-Jamal’s appointment, Irdeto has recently bolstered its anti-piracy team in Dubai, which works to track MENA-specific trends in piracy and collates data on illegal content access for the prosecution of pirates operating across the region. Irdeto has also confirmed sponsorship of the ASBU BroadcastPro Selevision Summit and Awards 2015 as part of its efforts to increase anti-piracy awareness in the region.

BeIN Sports secures MENA Olympics rights

BeIN Sports has been awarded the exclusive MENA broadcast rights for the Olympic games between 2018 and 2024. The deal covers all broadcast platforms, including free-to-air TV, pay TV, internet and mobile video. The pay TV network reportedly paid more than $150m to secure the coverage of four games in total from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
Al Jazeera upgrades with Calrec

Al Jazeera Media Network has purchased seven Apollo digital audio consoles from Calrec Audio for its broadcast facility in Doha, Qatar. The purchase is part of a full modernisation of the Doha facility, which houses 24-hour operations for Al Jazeera’s English, Arabic and Mubasher channels. The purchase marks the largest Apollo deployment in the Middle East, and with it, the creation of one of the world’s largest Hydra2 networks.

The first Apollo console is being installed by systems integrator Tek Signals. It joins other Calrec consoles in Al Jazeera facilities across the world, including two Artemis consoles in London, three in Washington as well as two Artemis and a Summa console in Rome. The remaining six Apollo consoles for Doha will be delivered throughout 2015 and will be installed as the project progresses.

“We decided to use Calrec as our global standard for audio because we needed a reliable console for our 24/7 environment,” stated Allie Gaffoor, Lead Audio Specialist for Al Jazeera Network and the project. “Calrec meets our networking and I/O needs, and Calrec’s Hydra2 and Hydra2X technologies fit our requirements exactly.”

Icflix ties with Maroc telecom and Zain Kuwait

Icflix has announced the start of a new exclusive partnership with Maroc Telecom, which will allow the telco’s customers to participate at the price of $13.6 by texting “ICFLIX” to 800 (free service). Maroc Telecom, a company has announced.

Icflix is the point of reference for TV viewing in over 12m homes from Morocco to the Middle East, said: “This satellite will accelerate the transition to HD services and facilitate the rapid deployment of advanced television services such as ultra high-definition broadcasts. With its launch, Eutelsat is ensuring that the bandwidth is available for broadcasters to deliver high-definition today and the immersive viewing experience of 4K in the future. It will enable viewers across the region to access the widest choice of viewing options, using one single dish.”

Eutelsat set to launch new satellite for MENA

Eutelsat’s latest satellite, EUTELSAT 8 West B, has arrived at the European spacecraft in French Guiana and is now in the final stages of preparation for launch by an Ariane 5 rocket on 28 August. EUTELSAT 8 West B will shore up the 78° West position, hosting Eutelsat and Nilsat satellites, that in the point of reference for TV viewing in over 12m homes from Morocco to the Middle East, will enable broadcasters to deliver high-definition today and the immersive viewing experience of 4K in the future. It will enable viewers across the region to access the widest choice of viewing options, using one single dish.”

Globecast to distribute Quran Hidayah channels

Globecast has been selected by Quran Hidayah International Network to provide a comprehensive suite of playout and distribution services to launch 40 channels around the world. Quran Hidayah is based on readings of the Holy Quran in multiple languages. Digital Media has been working with Quran Hidayah International Network to create these channels, providing a wide range of production services. Globecast hosts Digital Media’s playout platform and provides the services around that to manage the playout servers. Digital Media manages the content and uploads it using remote playout capabilities. For operators, this means they can upload the content remotely, using a simple web-based scheduling app.
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sennheiser.com/avx

Star Trek 3 to film in Dubai

Chairman and MD of Dubai Studio City, said that the production would “provide a great opportunity for local talent to acquire new skills and gain first-hand insight into the techniques and processes required for a film of this size.”

“The shooting of this film in the emirate is a testament to Dubai and the UAE’s development into a hub for film and production, and Paramount Pictures joins the growing interest from regional and international filmmakers,” stated Al Sharif.

Prime Entertainment Group ties with MBC

Prime Entertainment Group has announced a package deal of 578 hours with MBC. The MENA-based company broadcasts in Mauritius in multiple languages including English and French. The group has grown to 18 channels including a sports channel in recent months.

Ooredoo Kuwait and Vuclip partner

Ooredoo Kuwait and Vuclip have partnered to provide mobile video-on-demand service. Using Vuclip’s Dynamic Adaptive Transcoding Technology, Ooredoo Kuwait will offer its viewers the opportunity to enjoy unbuffered videos, optimised for network variability, across all mobile devices.

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**Qatar-backed Miramax looks for buyers**

Investors behind Miramax, the Hollywood studio part-owned by Qatar Investment Authority, are reportedly exploring a sale. Bloomberg reported that the studio that made Oscar winners *Shakespeare in Love* and *Pulp Fiction*, has already held talks with one potential buyer.

Miramax, which owns more than 700 films, could fetch as much as $1bn, a report said.

Founded in 1979 by brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein, Miramax was sold to Walt Disney Company in 1993. It was subsequently sold in 2010 to investors that included Qatar Investment Authority and real estate investment firm Colony Capital, in a deal reportedly worth around $663m.

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**BBC News launches new app**

The BBC has launched a new international BBC News app for iOS and Android devices. The free app offers a personalised approach to its news on the go, combining top stories and most-watched stories with a set of personally selected or recommended topics, chosen from a range of more than 50,000 subjects.
Bahraini integrated communications provider Batelco has selected datamena to deploy a point-of-presence (PoP). Datamena acts as a hub for regional and international carriers, making it easy to interconnect and provide different services. The deployment will serve Batelco Bahrain and the Batelco Group.

Fahad Al Hassawi, Chief Commercial Officer, du, said: “We are delighted to welcome Batelco Bahrain into datamena. As the leading integrated communications provider, Batelco will provide more options for reliable services to datamena customers. On the other hand, Batelco will benefit from the ecosystem of carriers, content and cloud providers to enable new services and improve end-user experience.” This will also enable Batelco to further develop its portfolio of technically advanced solutions such as cloud and managed services, and other data-intensive services. In line with Batelco’s expansion plans, the new PoP allows Batelco easy access by facilitating further interconnection with other carriers, thus extending it to Batelco’s global network.

Launched by du in 2012 and based in the UAE, datamena offers customers a platform of co-location, connectivity, infrastructure and expertise. It presents an opportunity for customers looking to expand upon their global footprint, and acts as a growth accelerator for digital businesses in both the UAE and the Gulf. Batelco Group is headquartered in Bahrain.

Du’s ad campaign du Tuesday has bagged a Bronze Lion in the Film Craft category at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2015. The win brings a number of firsts to the MENA region, making du the only telecommunications operator – both regionally and globally – to win in the Cannes Lions Film Craft category. In addition, du is the first company from the region to take home a prize in that category two years in a row, for its du Tuesday campaign. Last year, du earned the UAE’s first-ever Gold Lion at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2014. It marked the first time that an entry from the region had ever won a Gold Lion in the film category.

Du to have more Novo IMAX

Novo Cinemas has announced that through its partnership agreement with IMAX Corporation, the company will add two new IMAX theatres in Dubai, which will feature laser projection and sound technology. The IMAX theatres will be located at two new Novo Cinemas locations – at IMAX Worlds of Adventure and Wafi Shopping Centre. The deal builds on the parties’ recent agreement for an IMAX theatre that will be added to the Novo Cinemas multiplex at Dubai Festival City Mall. The three new IMAX theatres bring the Novo IMAX network to six – the largest in the region – with cinemas in Dubai, Doha and soon to open in Manama.

Ex-Canon executive Karine Fouque is joining Ithaki-Group and Jacques Delacoux’s team to lead global sales of Transvideo and Aaton Digital. With extensive experience of direct and indirect sales as well as strategic marketing of professional cinema equipment at European level, Fouque is ready to take on the new role.

MEET THE NEW KP-SERIES INTERCOM KEYPANELS WITH OMNEO IP TECHNOLOGY ON BOARD.

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Comedy is king. There is no pan-Arab audience. TV is not dead. Oh! How we laughed. Comedy always does well in Ramadan, but a lot of effort seems to go into big dramas and series. Undoubtedly, they get respectable audiences, but I suspect that on a cost-per-minute basis, they don’t provide as good a return as relatively cheap humour. Everyone likes to laugh, whether it’s with the family in the early evening or with friends late at night. MBC has some major set-piece historical drama, but this year’s Alf Leila We Leila (1001 Nights) was consistently outside the top five programmes for all Arabs, unlike Shabayet Al Carton in 2014. In fact, the top drama in both years was the old favourite Bab Al Hara, now in season seven. The difference this year was that whereas Bab Al Hara conquered all in 2014, this year it had to settle for second place behind Ramez Wakel Al Gowe. Last year, Ramez and his practical jokes on unsuspecting victims only managed a third place. In fact, Ramez packed a triple punch. Not only did the daily premiere in primetime get an average of more than 290,000 viewers and a stunning 30% share of viewing, but the repeats at 4am and again in the afternoon were the ninth and tenth most watched shows. If the viewing was unduplicated, it would bring the total to nearly 370,000 per day. The 4am slot is a very clever piece of scheduling, designed to catch the Blakey-eyed around Solhour as they prepare for the day of fasting ahead and are looking for some light entertainment, or even watching again what they saw the previous night. It wasn’t all about Ramez either. In third place was another comedy, Selfie, scheduled in early evening to capture family viewing after Iftar, strategically placed after the popular animation series Shabayet Al Carton, which captured seventh and eighth place, showing simultaneously on Dubai TV and Sama Dubai. Six of the top ten programmes in 2014-15 were animation or comedy.

Let’s accept these as the new tenets of Ramadan viewing: Comedy is king. There is no pan-Arab audience. TV is not dead. Deadlines being what they are, I have to add the caveat that, at the time of writing, there are still a few days of Ramadan left, but I’ll do my best to make comparisons to previous years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Arab Programme</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Emirati Programme</th>
<th>Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bab Al Hara – S6</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Bab Al Hara – S7</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ramez Wakel Al Gowe (21:30)</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Shabayet Al Carton – S10</td>
<td>Dubai Al Oula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Omna Rowayhet Alayna</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Sawalef Talash 2</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alf Leila We Leila</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Sawalef Talash 3</td>
<td>Dubai Al Oula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ostaz Wa Raas Qesim</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Selfie</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shabayet Al Carton – S9 (Sama)</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Shabayet Al Carton</td>
<td>Sama Dubai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ramez Wakel Al Gowe (06:00)</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Law Enny Aaraf</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Horol Wa Dif</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Al Rawy</td>
<td>Sama Dubai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alo Faysou</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Fi Alayya Oghnia</td>
<td>Sama Dubai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ramez Wakel Al Gowe (16:30)</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
<td>Selfie</td>
<td>MBC1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 1: All Arabs Top Programmes 2014-2015 | Table 2: Expat Arab and Emirati Programmes (first 15 days) | Chart 1: Total TV Viewing 2013-2015 | Chart 2: Expat Arab and Emirati Programmes (first 15 days) |
The message here is that if you want to reach an Emirati audience, you have to think beyond the channels aimed at pan-Arab viewers.

It also means that channels like Al Emarat and Sama Dubai can punch above their weight, even with individual programmes. Al Emarat, for example, was tenth as an overall Arab channel but halfway through Ramadan had the top Emirati programme in Shuhoh Al Roh, which doesn’t surface in the top 20 for all Arabs. This sort of thing is missed by too many agencies and advertisers, who don’t look sufficiently closely at the detail.

It’s a trend which has only increased in the last few years and will continue to do so while authorities like twofour54 in Abu Dhabi and the new Dubai Creative Cluster support the development of UAE production and development, as they show every sign of doing.

TV is not dead
At the risk of contradicting myself, the audience in 2015 was smaller and watched less TV.

• The average Arab household watched about eight hours 20 minutes every day this year, compared to eight hours 33 minutes last year.

• The average daily audience was 484,000 in 2015, down from 519,000 in 2014.

But before everyone stampedes for the lifeboats, let’s take a closer look at these figures.

First, and very importantly, recall what was happening in summer 2014: the World Cup. It had a significant impact on viewing, especially in the late evening and early morning, with the knockout stages and final taking place during Ramadan.

Second, both 2014 and 2015 were up on 2013: when the average daily audience was under 400,000, as Chart 1 shows. It’s based on Total TV so it includes any time the TV was on, even for channels viewers don’t monitor, so it’s a good benchmark.

The average audience shows us how much TV was watched. It’s the same as saying that around 900,000 people watched every minute of the day.

A more important figure might be the overall reach – the number of people who switch on at any given time. This shows that reach has been increasing and, in fact, increased from 2014 to 2015. So more people watched TV, they just consumed a little less of it each.

The other piece of evidence I submit in defence of TV is the popularity of repeats. If people are indeed flocking to video on demand, second screen and so on, surely repeat episodes will be the first to suffer? Why wait for something in the linear environment when you can see it any time, anywhere?

The answer is multi-faceted, but at heart, it lies in the enduring popularity of television as a social medium enjoyed as a sit-back experience.

Social media
That brings me to a final point on social media, and specifically, Twitter.

Over Ramadan, EMMC and Kantar, which operates the tview research called Twitter TV. So far, this is up and running only in the UAE’s television ratings and audience measurement system, the first in the Middle East.

It’s based on looking at TV hashtags related to programmes, actors, channels, etc in a window around programme transmission time. From that, we can calculate the number of tweets, retweets, total impressions and views, and a host of other data. We can even drill down into brand affinity, answering questions like are people who tweet about this programme likely to also tweet about brands and vice versa.

As it’s only a pilot and we’re still analysing and digesting the results with the channels which took part, I can’t at this stage offer any detailed insight. It’s also based on regional activity, so correlation to programmes is difficult. What’s remarkable, however, is the amount of activity about television. Social media and TV really are very complementary, not competitive.

For the most talked-about programme on Twitter on a busy day, there may be more than 50,000 tweets by about 25,000 authors, peaking at over 1,000 tweets a minute.

From what we can see, the pattern tends to work around tweeting during ad breaks. Looking at how this varies in different types of programmes will be one of the areas we’ll be looking at... but that’s another article.

Christopher O’Hearn is GM of Emirates Media Measurement Company, which has rolled out tview, the UAE’s television ratings and audience measurement system, the first in the Middle East.

### Table 3: Total Audience, all Arabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Reach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan 2013</td>
<td>2,344,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan 2014</td>
<td>2,518,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan 2015</td>
<td>2,712,968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Sony F55 covered the entire football field to give a panoramic view of the Emir Cup finals.

**Snapshot**
- **Objective:** To cover the Emir Cup finals in 4K
- **End users:** Al Kass Network
- **Highlights:** Sony 4K Stitch, I-Movix X10 UHD ultra-motion system, Dolby 5.1
- **Location:** Doha, Qatar
- **Key vendors:** Sony, I-Movix, Axon, Dolby

The Emir Cup in Qatar recently saw the first regional use of the Sony 4K Stitch, the I-Movix X10 UHD 4K ultra-motion camera and a live production using Dolby 5.1. *BroadcastPro ME* finds out how Al Kass Network integrated all of these technologies to create a superlative viewing experience.

Doha-based Al Kass Network has been broadcasting the Emir Cup since 2006. With more than five million people watching the football tournament live on TV, it is Qatar’s most popular sporting event. Over the years, under the leadership of Samer Younes, Technical Advisor at the network, Al Kass has used the broadcast of Emir Cup as a technology showcase, deploying a full range of products.

Every year, the broadcaster attempts to do something new: 2010 saw the first broadcast of the Emir Cup final in 3D, with footage beamed from Arabsat using the full transponder for 3D. Last year saw the first deployment of cameras using 300 frames per second in slow motion.

This year saw the Sony 4K Stitch technology and the region’s first Dolby 5.1 live production. Al Kass also tested the I-Movix X10 UHD 4K ultra-motion camera with 4K zooming technology in a live sporting event – a first for the region.

Al Kass has been using the best technology to give its viewers a memorable experience, claims Samer Younes.

“The Emir Cup is the most popular tournament in Qatar, broadcast throughout the MENA region and streamed live worldwide on our website,” he explains, adding that coverage of the three-week event brought together more than 100 crew at the various stadiums, with the finals taking place on May 23 at Thani bin Jassim Stadium.

The Sony 4K Stitch

“We wanted to ensure that the viewer did not miss even a split second of the game. In order to achieve that, we had the entire field covered so that we could show every goal, the hits and the misses. Based on our requirement, Sony put together the design for the event’s coverage for broadcast,” says Younes.

Sony Middle East and Africa and Fifty One East, a Qatar-based retail chain for professional broadcast equipment, partnered with the Qatar Football Association (QFA) for the fifth consecutive year to be the official sponsor of the Emir Cup 2015. A renewed three-year agreement was signed with the QFA in 2014, confirming their sponsorship for the tournament in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In order to test the Sony 4K Stitch, the Sony team, including Diaz Ernesto, Takeshi Shibagaki and Takuma Wada for equipment installation and Vinod Nair for coordination with Al Kass Network visited the stadium a month before the start of the tournament to check possible camera positions. Two Sony F55 4K cameras were positioned in such a way that each camera could cover half of the field and the footage received from these was then stitched together.

The 4K Stitch software allows you to view the stitched image whilst enabling dynamic extraction of...
The servers and other equipment were kept in the patch room and connected to the OB van parked in the stadium. Sony also trained Al Kass staff to use the system, and testing was conducted with the help of the broadcaster’s operations team.

“The Sony 4K stitch allowed us to cover the entire football field in a single frame. At any given time, the entire playing pitch is in the field of view, which allows the operator to use virtual cameras to focus on any part of the field and take HD cut out of that section and use it for live broadcast. The stitched image can also be used for game analysis, and to verify on-field infringements or fouls,” explains Younes.

As a pilot project, the 4K Stitch system was only used for the Emir Cup and then returned to the vendor.

“The innovative OLED display shows the distance of the focal plane from the camera system and the depth of fields, therefore ideal for creative image composition. For the demanding photographer, the OLED display is an absolute highlight – an innovation that is currently unparalleled in camera lenses.”

“The new ZEISS Batis 2/25 and 1.8/55 lenses are the first full-frame autofocus lenses with an OLED display for the mirrorless Sony a series and therefore the pioneers of a new era. As professional tools, they enable outstanding outcomes with optimal image performance, impressive contrast and maximum resolution down to the very last detail.

The team chose the X10 UHD at 350fps to achieve the required quality of playback while keeping replays short enough to fit into the overall balance of coverage. The X10 UHD system integrates the Flex 4K camera from Vision Research and consists of four items: the camera box (camera interface between the Flex4K and the camera control unit), the camera control unit (CCU) in the core of the ultra-motion system, the operational control panel, which controls all the parameters of the camera, such as colour settings, and helps the operator choose the frame rate; and the slow-motion remote to choose the sequence of ultra-motion images to replay, for example.

The Sony 4K Stitch enabled Al Kass to cover the entire football field in a single frame.
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MEAs total entertainment & media spend will increase from $43.5BN in 2014 to $65.9BN in 2018*

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“We wanted to ensure that the viewer did not miss even a split second of the game. In order to achieve that, we had the entire field covered so that we could show every goal, the hits and the misses. Based on our requirement, Sony put together the design for the event’s coverage for broadcast.”

Samer Younes,
Technical Head, Al Kass TV

technology with Vision Research’s Phantom Flex4K camera, the X10 UHD supports operation in a range of modes to meet different production requirements, and can be instantly reconfigured for new 4K or HD shooting scenarios.

“Moreover, the workflow of our camera is standard and the same as any standard broadcast camera used by TV directors all over the world.”

Ducobu explains that the camera is connected to the CUU in the OB van by a simple SMPTE fibre connection, and the camera control unit is connected to the broadcaster’s production servers with a standard HD-SDI connection.

“Since Al Kass is one of our historical partners and an early adopter of I-Movix technologies, we will always offer them the possibility to test any new ultra-motion solutions that we will develop in the future.”

I-Movix has, in the past also, used the Emir Cup as an opportunity to organise demonstrations of its new products.

The systems used in the Emir Cup finals had been updated with the latest software, which provides increased light sensitivity and other picture quality enhancements, but for events shot at night under artificial light, there is an optional d-flicker system for the cameras, to guarantee flicker-free replays in less than ideal conditions.

“We did not use this feature during the Emir Cup, but were ready to use it if needed,” informs Ducobu.

The cameras in the stadium were linked to the three OB vans via microwave and DSNG truck. The footage was used as a live signal, and the editing was done on Avid Media Composer.

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Easy to integrate → Watch Folders, MAM integration or manual operation

Easy to configure → Simple visual workflow creation tool (no scripting)
Al Kass Network

Qatar-based Al Kass Network comprises eight HD channels. While Al Kass one to four are free-to-air channels, Al Kass five to eight are paid channels that work with beIN Sports cards. The network covers international sport news and events with a special focus on football in Qatar and the GCC. Al Kass Network is the official broadcast channel of the Qatar Football Stars League (QSL), Qatar Stars Cup (QSC), The H.H. Emir Cup and the H.A.Soccer Cup, and was the host broadcaster of the 2011 AFC Asian Cup held in Qatar. In addition, the network also covers other major regional and international sports events including the Gulf Cup and the AFC Champions League.

Dolby 5.1

Two of Al Kass’ main HD channels were accompanied by full Dolby Digital+ (DD+) 5.1 audio. The soundtracks were 100% natively produced by the broadcaster’s team and accompanied live coverage, with surround sound adding an extra dimension to the excitement of high-octane football. Owing to this, viewers could choose from their homes whether they wanted to listen to Dolby or stereo. Working in close cooperation with Axon and Dolby, we recorded it for eight of our channels and attempted the live production of the first live Dolby production in the MENA region. Axon allowed us to use the satellite transmission of the Dolby system and also provided the encoder for the same,” says Younes. Only a few weeks prior to the Emir Cup, during initial live trials with DD+ transmission of 5.1 content, Dolby and Axon worked closely with the Al Kass team to translate the technical requirements into a comprehensive solution, assisting in defining loudness, dial norms, and the look and feel of Al Kass live. “This was an absolute novelty in the region: the very first in-house, natively produced 5.1 production and transmission in DD+. The processing of DD+ was facilitated through Axon’s Synapse modular range, consisting of the HPD100 PCM to Dolby Digital or Dolby Digital Plus transcoders and the DLA44 providing for the loudness management. We also plan to add DD+ to all the eight HD channels at a later stage,” says Mark Barkey, Regional Sales Director, Middle East, Africa and Turkey at Axon Digital Design.
Our world.
The largest Arab community in the sky at 26° East. Your world.
The various radio stations based in the UAE broadcast in a variety of languages to cater to the unique demographic segments in the country. This makes radio in the UAE quite diverse. While in many international markets, radio has suffered a decline in revenues as a result of the shift of consumers to digital platforms, it remains resilient in the face of digital migration and economic challenges in the Arab world. In fact, according to Arab Media Outlook, radio is the fastest-growing advertising platform after digital.

Radio’s inherent capacity to adapt is the main reason for its success, says Mahmoud Al Rasheed, General Manager at Arabian Radio Network (ARN).

“The dynamics of each market vary. The UAE runs on cars; everyone drives here and people look for a very personalised experience in their cars, which radio provides. Moreover, for advertisers, radio offers a cost-effective platform for advertising. The sector is booming at a time when leading advertisers have slashed their overall advertising spend but increased the share for radio. At ARN, we are conscious of this and have used these factors to our advantage, creating a thriving bouquet of stations that cater to the diverse demography of the UAE.”

He also points out that ARN has embraced the change and has evolved in the wake of online offerings, and now features a host of digital services to stay ahead of the curve.

“In an exclusive interview with Vibhuti Arora, ARN’s head honchos Mahmoud Al Rasheed and Steve Smith elaborate on how multiplatform technology is driving radio and what makes it unique in the UAE.”

The radio network’s Chief Operating Officer, Steve Smith, explains that he doesn’t consider himself to be in radio anymore, but rather in the business of multiplatform content creation.

“Content that’s going out is not necessarily audio these days; it can be video, and content especially tailored for social media. These new platforms, be it social media or our apps, enable us to engage with our listeners at a lot of different levels. Smartphone technology is driving this evolution.”

In fact, radio has adapted better than other media because of its ability to move fast, he points out.

Radio in this market is bigger than Facebook and even print media. The UAE is home to more than 40 radio stations with a diverse mix of genre and content. As the largest radio network in the UAE, with nine channels and 3.2 million daily listeners, ARN has been constantly pushing the envelope in terms of both technology and content to stay ahead in the game, claims Smith.

The radio network has been making the transition to digital for over five years now, and has trained and enabled its teams both on- and off-air to deliver content across multiple platforms. All of the station’s FM radio stations are fully multiplatform, with content accessible online and via smartphone apps, and the ARN websites are strongly promoted on the radio stations. Online streaming and apps are complemented and enhanced by blogging, podcasting and active social media.
Smith gives an example of the ARN content circle, to show how radio is seamlessly integrating with new media.

“If you listen to a radio channel in the morning, we encourage our listeners to watch the video that we have posted on social media, connect back and share it, like it, share it across different social media platforms, where the content gets more exposure, encouraging the audience to listen again. This is how we expand our content circle, constantly engaging with the audience and giving them what they want,” he explains, citing a recent competition for a house in Kerala as a prize on ARN’s Malayalam channel that received 8.5m SMS messages in three weeks.

From a strategic point of view, smartphone is a game-changer according to Smith, and it’s time that content creators realised that. The UAE has the highest usage level of smartphones in the world, with 250% penetration.

“Smartphone is a game-changer according to Smith, and it’s time that content creators realised that. The UAE has the highest usage level of smartphones in the world, with 250% penetration.

In this environment, our consumers are obsessed with smartphones, I call us the ‘look down’ generation, where people constantly look down at their phones. Five years ago, we invested close to a million dollars to develop world-standard apps, which is reaping benefits today.”

There has been a massive surge in mobile listenership in non-traditional times for the network’s various stations – the most listened-to time via the apps is 3:20pm – and traditional terrestrial peak time is also growing, opening a new window of opportunity to advertisers, who can pitch their wares from the start of the day to the end.

With the smartphone revolution, ARN’s focus is now on its apps and seeking more user engagement through them. The ARN apps are not just about streaming terrestrial content, they are now the network’s messaging service as well, and are used to interact with the studio. In fact, the recently launched free messaging service is the first in the world, claims the network.

“Video is becoming such a massive component of our content. When Kris Fade (an RJ at Virgin radio) does something, listeners want to know and they engage with him on social media and through our apps,” says Smith.

While the network’s digital

“We have transitioned from traditional to multi-platform in the last few years. This transition has been organic and gradual. We are in a constant state of change and adapting to the ever-changing technology”

Mahmoud Al Rasheed, General Manager, ARN

Mahmoud Al Rasheed says that the dynamics of each market vary and radio enjoys a unique place in the UAE’s car-centric society.

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offerings are generating a lot of interest, its traditional broadcast infrastructure is updated from time to time to offer quality products to its core listeners. ARN’s main transmitters are from Rhode and Schwarz and are housed in Al Maai Tower in Jumeirah Lakes Towers in Dubai. An upgrade of the backup transmitters at Dubai’s Emirates Towers is currently underway. These are new-generation transmitters with a liquid cooling system. In the studios, two types of mixers from Studer 2500 and 2000 and Aeon Klotz are deployed. The network’s stations are built on RCS software Zetta for digital radio automation. “The hardware doesn’t change, but its usage level does. Manufacturers come to us to share their R&D, so we are involved from the time they develop their equipment. We are the first in the region to use Zetta, and among the first few in the world. Zetta can be configured on a single computer running multiple stations or on a large network running hundreds of stations,” points out Al Rasheed. In-car innovation is yet another technological advancement. ARN is involved in numerous conversations with car manufacturers, dealers and distributors about how to get more interactive inside the car, without leaving the steering wheel. The connected car solutions can be divided into two camps, Al Rasheed explains. Built-in-the-car manufacturers such as Honda and Toyota are developing in-dash solutions. In fact, any car built after 2010 has connected car features built-in as standard, even if that is only Bluetooth for automatic smartphone integration. The other way is installing the system with a number of plug-in systems available in the market. “That’s the edge radio has over other media. You cannot watch TV while driving, but you can listen to the radio,” reiterates Al Rasheed. Radio is the fourth most prominent advertising platform after newspapers, TV and outdoor advertising in the UAE. Even when TV and print declined in 2009 due to global recession, radio revenues continued to rise. In the UAE, the cost of placing a 30-second spot at peak-time on radio is a thirtieth of what it would be on TV. Radio dominates and is highly cost-effective. “TV is generally a pan-Arab sell and radio’s strength is very much local. Again, the cost of production for TV is comparatively much higher,” says Smith. For a brand wanting a high-reach, high-frequency campaign, a peak-time spot schedule spanning three months costs $60,000 – 100,000. Radio campaigns tend to work more effectively with consistent, longer schedules.

“Radio revenue is growing very fast here. Compared to newspaper or TV, radio gives frequency and it’s more effective. Radio is ideal for companies who have reduced their marketing budgets. Many companies have changed their strategy and are looking to invest more in radio and digital. The beauty of a network like ours is we can give you solutions that are traditional radio, non-traditional radio, digital as well as social media,” points out Al Rasheed. Each station under the ARN umbrella has its own target audience. Smith says that ARNs biggest revenue churner isVirgin, followed by City 101.6. Its Khaledji station plays only GCC music and has a huge fan following, while the Arabic channel plays expat Arabic music. “Virgin and City are close, while our Arabic brands are gaining much more traction from a commercial point of view,” Tag 91.1 is the latest addition to our stable and is growing fast.

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From a revenue and commercial point of view, it has performed extremely well,” Smith explains. While radio gets $4.4 million of advertising revenue in the UAE, Smith says. “I believe radio is getting way below its worth. In mature markets, it sits around 9-12% of total ad revenue. Here we are around 5-6% but the potential is massive. In the last two to three years, that 2% has grown,” he adds. Al Rasheed points out that radio advertising used to be less than 3% a few years ago. “The market was underestimating the potential of radio, but in the last couple of years things have changed, and we have noticed a heightened interest in radio,” Al Rasheed adds. The contributing factors have been engaging content and technology. Radio will continue to grow here because of the local component, small bandwidth and cost-effectiveness. Being more mobile than other media also works in its favour. Sceptics predicted the demise of radio when cassette players and CDs came, but the medium emerged even stronger. It has withstood the advent of the iPod and the smartphone. Technology that was seen as a threat to radio has in fact improved it. With streaming services becoming popular, does radio need to worry? “The likes of Pandora, Spotify, iHeart, Apple Music offer amazing

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"We are the first in the region to use the RCS Zetta, and among the first few in the world. Zetta can be configured on a single computer running multiple stations or on a large network running hundreds of stations"
technology that delivers very good products, but they are not local and don’t have the finger on the pulse of the community right here in the UAE,” says Smith. These services are not free, as they involve mobile data and a subscription fee, adds Al Rasheed.

Radio scores for its focus on local content. In-car listenership takes the largest share of the radio pie. For a network to be successful, it needs to evolve and adapt to change, offer compelling content and keep a finger on the pulse of the listeners.

Commenting on the challenges in the local market, Smith points out that the industry needs a “robust data system to understand who is listening”. “There are some issues we can solve together as an industry such as a reliable ratings method. To do that, we talk regularly with our competitors and cooperate as an industry,” he concludes.
It has taken a while, but broadcasters are learning to trust file-based playout to keep their channels on air, just as bikers entrust their safety to on-board processors.

In a heady, reminiscible and distant past, I used to watch my local motorcycling heroes tear up a makeshift motocross track on the outskirts of my village. It was mesmerising and I was hooked on the sounds, smells and experience. In the early days, the 1000cc 20 brake horsepower bikes had a very cumbersome, manual based gear system, and changing gears required great skill. These bikes had no suspension and scrawny tyres and were very hard to ride. The experience was not that dissimilar to that of a broadcast engineer in the early days of television. Their task was to keep the channel on air and running flawlessly by manually driving master control operations. This required great skill and the ability to fully understand the vast array of different purpose-built devices and interfaces needed to run the channel. Broadcast problems that could cause the station to go off air needed to be avoided at all cost, because dark air would cause viewers to switch channels and mean the station would lose eyeballs and advertising revenue. As a result, great skill was needed to master the art of the broadcast engineer.

Both early motorcycles and early forms of broadcast television were art forms that had their thrills – the stakes were high, and the risk of going off air or off the road were great. Each used specific, purpose-built hardware and both relied heavily on human senses and specialised skills to perform at their best. From a broadcaster’s perspective, there is nothing more harrowing than having your channel go off the air because of a technical problem. Similarly, a mistake by a bike rider can turn tragic in ways we prefer not to contemplate – just as the motorcycle rider needed a team of mechanics and back-up parts from manufacturers to keep the engine purring and the parts lubricated, a team of master control operators with keen eyes and ears was necessary to look after each channel’s scheduling, video, audio, channel black and graphics, to keep the programming flowing and viewers’ eyes on the screen. They too were supported further by an extended team of different manufacturers’ technical support engineers.

“Like this next generation of integrated playout solutions, the modern 1,000cc 200BHP sports bikes are more dependent on software and computer technology and less dependent on mechanical elements”

Micky Edwards, VP Sales EMEAA, BroadStream Solutions

Bike enthusiasts took to building heavily customised bikes using parts from different makes, models and manufacturers. Similarly, old-school master control playout systems were also built using equipment from multiple manufacturers. Stations purchased purpose-built devices with different capabilities and assembled them with the help of a systems integrator to create a unique system for each station to meet their special needs. A big part of the integration job was ensuring that the server from manufacturer A could communicate with the graphics box and scheduling system along with other components from various other manufacturers.

These systems often took months to install and debug before a channel was able to go on the air. With the proliferation of new channels and networks, broadcasters needed a cost-effective way to scale and expand that would save money, improve efficiency and ensure more advertising revenue. Gradually, a number of new playout solutions appeared on the market with built-in features and functionality that were once the bespoke remit of individual manufacturers, marking the start of a revolution in the way playout solutions were manufactured, commonly known as channel-in-a-box.

Right now, broadcasters are at the next phase of this revolution and channel-in-a-box has evolved into integrated playout, a software approach that eliminates the need for most purpose-built hardware devices. This jump in capability has been made possible by significant leaps in computer hardware, speed and capacity over the years and progressively more sophisticated software frameworks that provide developers with much more flexibility with their architecture and design.

File-based workflows are now more broadly adopted on a global scale, beginning more than a decade ago with a few pioneers leading the change. For example, 9X Media in India chose an integrated playout solution in 2008, when the concept of file-based playout was relatively nascent and buying a legacy solution would have been the safest option. It has since proved to be one of the best investments the firm ever made, because the software has continuously evolved to give them more flexibility and confidence as they launch more channels. 9X Media has even been able to develop in-house automation interfaces based on XML, so that a single file is all that’s required to trigger all graphical elements, which otherwise would require additional
PROTECH

"Just as the motorcycle rider needed a team of mechanics and back-up parts from manufacturers to keep the engine purring and the parts lubricated, a team of master control operators with keen eyes and ears was necessary to look after each channel’s scheduling"

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from minutes to hours – all under an automated system with very high-end but easy-to-use graphics, tickers, RSS feeds and a multi-channel monitor with control over HTML-5 web-based clients. Like this next generation of integrated playout solutions, the modern 1,000cc 200BHP sports bikes depend more on software and computer technology and less on mechanical elements. In both cases, software is used to make thousands of connections and decisions per second to make the best use of resources, whether using an IP connection to deliver content to panning clients, or dealing with gyros measuring lean angle and the latest in automated dynamic suspension damping. Not many master control manufacturers can claim they are truly established in the file-based playout space. Some just talk about it while they have their newer systems on their older architecture, rather than taking a whole new look at the way broadcasting is done. Today’s discerning broadcaster client is looking for more. They need flexibility, scalability and revolutionary approaches to modern problems. For example, redundancy is no longer enough – broadcasters want business continuity, the ability to continue broadcasting even if they experience multiple failures. This requires several layers of redundancy that work together to provide a secure, reliable and solid playout platform. Like today’s sports bikes, loads of safety features and a host of electronic systems help keep the bike safe and secure in all sorts of weather and road conditions, from rain modes to traction control, ABS braking and lean angle monitoring and power delivery. Today’s rider has the ability to switch these in and out and set their bike up differently each time they ride. The same level of flexibility can be found in the best integrated playout systems. Looking at where we started in master control, the evolution to integrated playout is amazing, and when I look back on my first Puch moped, compared to my latest BMW, I see many similarities in their evolution. It’s taken a while, but broadcasters are learning to trust automated systems, just as motorcyclists have learnt to trust the computer in their bikes. Both retain a certain level of human intervention, but the risk of making a late or quick change have been eliminated as these new sophisticated machines are able to react at the last moment. Programmes stay on-air; the rider stays on the bike. PRO
Canon’s latest addition to its camcorder range is the XC10 - a compact and lightweight camcorder for convenient 4K/Full HD video shooting and 12 megapixel digital still photography. Priced at just USD 2,499, the 4K camcorder comes at a very affordable price point. High resolution is cool and certainly useful, but for me it is not the be all and end all, so let’s see what the camera is like.

Straight out of the box, my first thoughts were that it’s very light and easy to hold. It has an LCD screen that can be tilted for ease of viewing. The LCD is also touchscreen, which is great for convenience. Its distinctive design immediately catches one's attention. The XC10 is a good looking camera at first glance.

A clip-on loop viewfinder is also provided, which makes viewing outside much easier and allows for stable handheld work with three points of contact. The hand grip can be rotated 90 degrees, which makes high- and low-angle filming much more comfortable. The XC10 has a fixed lens with a 10x optical zoom and a 35mm equivalent focal length of 27.3 to 273mm for movies, which although not that wide, is certainly very long and versatile. In the 4:3 photo mode, the lens is 24.1 to 241mm for stills. There isn’t a servo zoom control on the lens, but Canon 4K video lens does feature both manual as well as auto focus.

That is all well, but for most professional filmmakers, glass can be more important than the camera itself, and
Canon makes some spectacular glass, so a fixed lens might be enough to turn some people off immediately. However, not everyone wants a shallow depth of field. It may be a struggle then to keep images sharp and carry additional lenses around, so for those users, a fixed lens is ideal.

I'll talk more about the lens later. Photo recording in movie recording mode and photo capture during movie playback can also be done on this camera. The image size, in this case, will be the same as the size of the images in which the movies are recorded and played back.

When you shoot video, it is recorded in H.264 compression and packed in MXF wrapper. In HD mode, the camera can shoot 50Mbps, which is the standard HD mode, the camera can shoot and packed in MXF wrapper. In recorded in H.264 compression and recorded and played back.

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“The XC10 supports pro features, including Zebras to help expose correctly and Peaking for focus. These were huge benefits for me when I started out in the world of 10kg Beta SP days and I still use them today in certain situations. For new or less experienced camera people, having these meters is excellent for ensuring the best-looking pictures possible.”

“Like the C100, the C300 and the C500, the XC10 can record Canon log, which preserves the contrast and sharpness and enables a high dynamic range.”

Harvey Glen, cinematographer

The XC10 runs a DIGIC DV 5 image processor. With this you get a total resolution of approximately 13.36 megapixels or 4224 x 3164. The camera can also shoot 12 megapixel stills (4000 x 3000). So it has incredibly high resolution for such a small, low-cost piece of kit.

Like the C100, the C300 and the C500, the XC10 can record Canon log, which preserves the contrast and sharpness and enables a high dynamic range of around 12 stops – again very impressive for this price bracket. The ISO is the highest I’ve ever seen – 109 to 29,000, which for me is mental! I try never to go above ISO 800; but with Canon’s C range, I have had very clean results with ISO 3200. ISO 20,000 is unbelievable, but of course, the pay-off is noise.

It’s a great camera for news production where you are not worried about the aesthetics but just need to capture what’s happening, such as a riot at night. We are all aware that technology is improving at lightning speed. Producers don’t get too excited thinking we don’t need lights anymore; that’s old news now. There is a huge difference between lighting for mood and emotion versus just illumination.

The camera takes CFast and SD cards, which makes life simple. You can use the SD card to store personal settings for configuration. The menu is easy to navigate and the option of using the touchscreen does work for most people, unless you have potatoes for fingers – then there’s the regular toggle.

You can crank the camera up to 100fps in PAL mode and 120 in NTSC, but the resolution drops all the way down to 720, with a bit rate of either 15 or 56. Again, for this price, the fact that you can record high frame rates is impressive, and if you’re cutting in HD, the viewer won’t notice the resolution difference. However, if you’re opting to maximise the camera and go for 4K capture, 720 isn’t ideal for your cut.

“Thats all the tech business out of the way. How does it actually work, and what’s the best application for the XC10? It’s small, its lightweight, and it’s easy to hold and move around with, which is a huge plus, especially for the new age filmmakers born from the DSLR era. XC10 supports pro features, including Zebras to help expose correctly and Peaking for focus. These were huge benefits for me when I started out in the world of 10kg Beta SP days and I still use them today in certain situations. For new or less experienced camera people, having these meters is excellent for ensuring the best-looking pictures possible.”

The lens of this camera doesn’t hold exposure once you zoom in, meaning on the widest end you can get F2.8 but once you start zooming in it limits the aperture to F1.2, then F4.8, and towards the very end at F9.6. This, I thought, was a drawback. So if you were zooming in during some action, your exposure would change, as would your depth of field. Using the lens as a prime and not zooming during a take would resolve this.

Again, for the price of the camera, these are small compromises.

With the high resolution of 4K (3840 x 2160), the argument is that you can always reframe and crop it in post, which for a documentary would

Harvey Glen, cinematographer

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make your post-process easier, but it is certainly a more viable option.

With the high ISO form factor, 3.5mm audio input, long battery life and ability to shoot 12 megapixel stills, the camera positions itself ideally in the run-and-gun observational documentary market, especially where the subject is sensitive and the director is the only crew or shooting with a super small crew. It is also suited to event and news coverage and works well as a back-up camera too.

Think about all the new and social media content that needs filming these days. The Canon XC10 is perfect for quick shoots that can go online within minutes. This camera won’t suit everyone, and remember you can’t compare all cameras against each other. The XC10 is not intended for TVCs, but it certainly does have its place, and for those users it will work wonders and be a decent solution. I think it’s a great content camera, and a 4K one at that! 🎥

### Canon XC10: Verdict

**Pros**
- High ISO form factor
- 3.5mm audio input
- Long battery life
- Shoots 12 megapixel stills

**Cons**
- The fixed lens doesn’t hold exposure when zoomed in
- The lens lacks a servo zoom control

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"It’s small, it’s lightweight, and it’s easy to hold and move around with, which is a huge plus, especially for the new age filmmakers born from the DSLR era"

Harvey Glen, cinematographer

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The Canon XC10 comes with a 10x optical zoom lens.
It’s all about the money
Besides the immediate cost reductions from eliminating a large amount of cabling (even shielded cabling can be swapped out for its cheaper unshielded counterpart), labour and expensive analogue signal processing equipment, there are also long-term operational savings brought about by networked AV. As there is no longer a need for big, bulky boxes, which are hard to move and constantly in danger of being damaged and accidentally reconfigured, the cost of ownership drops.

Ease of installation
Networked audio gets rid of a number of concerns that plague analogue implementations. Installers can swap their soldering irons, metal connectors and testing equipment for far simpler RJ-45 clips and network cable crimping tools. This means significantly less cabling, fewer connectors and simplified system design, which in turn translates to fewer points of failure and shorter installation timeframes. And with the availability of Power over Ethernet (PoE) equipment, even the hassle of having to wire the system to a power outlet is eliminated.

Rapid expansion
In a networked audio setup, the physical connections become irrelevant, since by using software controls, audio inputs can be dynamically routed from any input device to any output system – as long as they are both connected on the network.

“...networked audio setup, the physical connections become irrelevant, since by using software controls, audio inputs can be dynamically routed from any input device to any output system – as long as they are both connected on the network”

Ryan Burr, Technical Sales Manager, Sennheiser Middle East

Factors promoting adoption
So with all the evident benefits, is networked audio right for you or your customer? Well, as with any audio installation, the solution still needs to be dictated by system requirements rather than by industry buzzwords. This approach will, no doubt, favour some organisations more than others, but one of the main reasons digitally networked audio hasn’t yet completely overtaken analogue is the cost.

Today, however, the price difference has begun to erode due to the standardisation of protocols, which has introduced more choice into the market. Equipment can be swapped out far more easily, protecting long-term investments and safeguarding against vendor lock-in.

Finally, digitally networked audio is what customers are now asking for. They have already invested in IT cabling infrastructure, and their confidence in the security and reliability of these networks has encouraged them to ask why audio can’t be a part of this too.

But are we there yet?
There are several prominent players in the digital audio networking arena, including Dante by Audinate, EtherSound, CobramNet and Antom. Different vendors are backing different protocols, while a number of players are developing their own proprietary technologies. It is also worth mentioning MADI, which has been prevalent in the broadcast industry for quite some time. It allows a single thin cable to transmit up to 64 audio channels, lossless, over a distance of up to 2,000 metres.

The fact that we have to consider all of the different options is steering us towards a call for the standardisation of the protocol digital audio networks use. This is supported by the Audio Engineering Society, through their implementation of the AES 67 protocol in September 2013. Unfortunately, not all manufacturers of audio products have lent their support yet, but this seems close, with Audinate and QSC agreeing to the principle once they have ironed out the commercial implications.

Hopefully, other manufacturers will follow suit, thus alleviating the need for users to travel through which products will work with which protocols and having to compromise on equipment.

With a wide availability of solutions that are clearly being developed according to a long-term roadmap rather than a passing trend, we see digitally networked audio as the way forward.

One of the most promising trends in the audio sector in recent years has been the emergence of digital audio networking. Traditional analogue distribution systems are plagued by an inherent complexity: analogue distribution systems are plagued by an inherent complexity: analogue distribution is expensive and difficult, and flexible audio distribution systems is one and the same.

In this modern environment, it’s no wonder digitally networked audio is generating such attention.

This approach lets you build flexible audio installations by using industry standard CAT-5 networking equipment instead of far more expensive and typically error-prone analogue cables. Networked audio also helps eliminate the challenges of having to plan the audio cabling around existing utility structures and architectural hurdles, as it uses the network already in place.

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The power of networked audio
Networked audio is the way forward for audio distribution, as it helps eliminate the shortcomings of analogue and is cost-effective, says Ryan Burr.

You may also be interested in:

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With a wide availability of solutions that are clearly being developed according to a long-term roadmap rather than a passing trend, we see digitally networked audio as the way forward.
We invite you to join us for a free round of Golf. Meet TV, film and radio professionals directly and network in a relaxed, fun-filled environment.

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**IDX CW-F25 cuts the cable**

The new CW-F25 wireless HD video system from IDX offers images transmitting H.264 high-profile video at up to 25Mbps. The system uses dynamic frequency selection (DFS) to automatically choose the best available Wi-Fi channel.

The system’s beamforming technology is also used between the transmitter and receiver, limiting interference from other 5GHz users. In addition, adaptive variable bit rate prevents sudden black screen disconnection. It is a combination that means the CW-F25 delivers greater reliability than any other wireless system using Wi-Fi channels.

The new CW-F25 uses worldwide standard 802.11n technology. To mix seamlessly with wired camera systems, 8 x 64QAM channels are used with 64QAM modulation, achieving a maximum data rate of 300Mbps. This supports H.264/25Mbps high-profile video with four channels of high-quality embedded PCM audio.

www.idx-europe.co.uk

**Sony’s new handheld NXCAM**

Sony has added the HXR-NX100 to its NXCAM range of professional camcorders. The device supports multiple choices for a range of professional applications, from events to documentaries.

The HXR-NX100 features a 1.0 type Exmor R back-illuminated CMOS sensor with 20 megapixels. The sensor, approximately the same size as a Super 16mm film frame, is designed to deliver high resolution, low noise and quality images even in low-light conditions, as well as offering more depth of field control, as demanded by today’s diverse shooting requirements. It also features a fixed Sony G lens, offering 12x optical zoom from a 29mm angle of view at the wide end, which can be increased to 31x with Clear Image Zoom, while retaining full resolution with Pixel Super Resolution technology. Furthermore, zoom performance can be improved at any point with a digital extender by up to 48x.

www.sony-psmee.com

**Exterity’s smarter HD receivers**

The Exterity AvediaPlayer receiver r93xx IPTV set-top box is a compact HD receiver that connects any screen to an IP network to facilitate the receipt of live and recorded video streams.

The latest addition to the company’s line of AvediaPlayer receivers, the r93xx delivers advanced network-video decoding capabilities across a wide range of resolutions up to 1080p60, for improved image quality. It offers HDMI and analogue video outputs to match any screen or resolution. Compared to previous models, it typically delivers a 20% reduction in power consumption.

The new AvediaPlayer receivers work in tandem with Exterity’s Artio middleware to provide users with the ability to create and manage customised television, VoD and interactive experiences. The AvediaPlayer receivers also feature Power over Ethernet (PoE).

www.apterity.com

**Custom Consoles’ free-standing mount**

Custom Consoles’ MediaPost is a free-standing portable mount capable of accommodating flat monitor displays of up to 65-inch diagonal screen size.

The latest addition to Custom Consoles’ line of MediaPost receivers, the r93xx delivers advanced network-video decoding capabilities across a wide range of resolutions up to 1080p60, for improved image quality. It offers HDMI and analogue video outputs to match any screen or resolution. Compared to previous models, it typically delivers a 20% reduction in power consumption.

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www.customconsoles.co.uk

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Gefen launches the intuitive Matrix

The new Matrix Controller (EXT-CU-LAN) from Gefen promises an easier way to detect, configure and control Gefen HDMI, DVI and VGA over IP products via a user-friendly web interface. It discovers all Gefen sender and receiver units on a Local Area Network and assigns IP addresses to each one. Once senders and receivers are configured, it controls the routing of AV signals using the same functionality as a traditional cross-point matrix, but without the need for traditional AV cables. AV is distributed over LAN using a network switch, offering more flexibility in source and display placement, as well as scalability and ease of expansion.

It offers a user interface accessible through any web-enabled device, including smart phones, tablets and computers. Among other features, the controller eliminates the previously challenging situation of locating a device amidst a sea of IP addresses.

In addition to its intuitive web interface, it includes other control options.

www.gefen.com

Revolabs adds to Elite mics

Revolabs has added gosseineck microphones to its line of Elite wired microphones. In addition, the full line of wired microphones is now available with mute functionality and status LEDs.

www.revolabs.com

Amimon’s CONNEX powers drones

Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media has introduced a new wireless HD link for professional UAV drone applications. Amimon’s CONNEX offers 50Hz rate, 2x5 MIMO and automatic channel selection to ensure resilient connectivity, free from interference, specifically from UAV controls and 2.4GHz links.

The zero-latency transmission offers live, real-time imaging for broadcast, inspection and mission critical applications.

The zero-latency transmission offers live, real-time imaging for broadcast, inspection and mission critical applications. CONNEX’s multicast feature supports four screens simultaneously. CONNEX offers full HD 1080P at 60fps and a range of up to 1km. It also features a built-in OSD view (MAVLink) and gimbals control over Futaba S.Bus.

www.amimon.com

Albis Technologies makes a scene

Albis Technologies’ SceneGate 083 STB makes it easy for service providers to deploy new revenue-generating services. SceneGate 8083 STB makes it easy for service providers to deploy new revenue-generating services. SceneGate 8083 STB makes it easy for service providers to deploy new revenue-generating services.

www.amitv.com

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Calrec takes to the field
Calrec will debut two compact aluminium expansion units, its new Fieldbox I/O range and i2Hub switch point, that can be used to expand and distribute an HD/SDI network.

The new Fieldbox range of small-format (I/O units brings the advantages of Calrec’s HD/SDI stageboxes to rugged environments and areas in which rack space is at a premium. These 1U half-rack units are suited for work in outside broadcast environments in which I/O must be spread over a large area, such as a golf course. Fieldboxes can be located and distributed exactly where they are needed, using just two high-capacity network cables for full redundancy. This set up means significant savings on rigging time and cable storage and transport.

Bluebell goes remote with robotic interface
Bluebell will introduce the BN395 remote camera interface. The BN195 features two 3G-SDI cables from the camera position with an optional genlock return, plus a dual-port GigE link on two monomode fibres with optional single-fibre operation. The interface is suited for links to robotic/POV cameras and is designed to take advantage of HD-SDI and 100BaseT Ethernet signals. It can be used with bluebell’s robotic system or with third-party robotic/POV camera systems.

EVs goes live on IP
EVs will present multiple IP-based live production at IBC. Visitors will be presented with the live production possibilities offered by IP-based infrastructures, including content contribution between venue and studio and remote production operations. A series of live demos integrating EVS new IP-based solutions with third-party technologies will be featured. IBC visitors will learn both a gradual hybrid approach to the IP transition and an end-to-end solution which relies on a truly open architecture. The LSM Cockpit, which will showcase LSM Connect, MultiReview and Episo at IBC 2015, will display a single, cohesive environment of EVS technologies which lets operators pilot live productions with the new version of server software engine Multicam. Allowing even more in-live capabilities, this update gives broadcasters the ability to generate more emotion in audiences.

iZotope to debut at IBC 2015
iZotope is making its first formal appearance as an exhibitor at IBC 2015. The company will spotlight its RX family of post-production tools and the critical role it plays within post-production workflows. RX, RX Final Mix and RX loudness control are designed to solve common problems in the editing, mixing and delivery stage of audio post-production. By empowering both video and audio editors to effectively repair damaged audio, to achieve the best sonic balance and to monitor and control loudness levels, the RX family elevates audio quality while contributing significant time and cost savings to a typical broadcast TV or film production budget. RX can transform flawed audio into usable material by removing noise, distortion, reverb and other common audio problems. To be easy for editors to use, RX incorporates workflow-optimising functionality.

Eyevis widens display
Eyevis will present a variety of display technologies for TV studios, broadcast control rooms and productions at IBC. The new eyeLED slim cube EC-50-LHD-ISE-SLIM, at 422mm, is claimed to be the slimmest product in the market. As the only rear-projection display, it can also be mounted directly on a wall without a substructure. From the eyeLED series, Eyevis will showcase a video wall with 1920x1080 pixels with smallest panel pitch. HD LED modules from eyevis have already been installed in German TV studios and use multiple calibration features. The Eye-LCD-9800-GHD-LD is currently eyevis’ largest ultra-HD display. It features a screen diagonal of 260cm and four times full HD resolution with 39802160 pixels.

Cobalt Digital corrects colour
Cobalt will introduce the Cobalt 9980-CSC-30/HD/SD-SDI RGB colour-space corrector/frame sync with an integrated test-pattern generator for both the openGear framework and Cobalt’s Blue Box Group 1000 series. The only card of its kind for the openGear ecosystem, the 9980-CSC-30 provides a full-featured 3G/HD/SD-SDI colour corrector and an advanced frame sync/pattern generator. RGB-space colour correction with YCbcCr proc controls provides lift, gain, saturation, phase, white clip (hard and soft), black clip and colour saturation clip. The built-in pattern generator provides the colour-correction block with all required deck reference or offline AV sources, with the ability to mix live and recorded material. The recognised leader in quality, Cobalt will invite visitors to see how renowned post-production technologies such as LSM Connect, MultiReview and Pro convolution can be combined in a single, cohesive environment. Cobalt will also showcase its upcoming Cobalt Edge, a smaller, lighter, rack-mountable version of its RTM 3G real-time monitoring device. This new portable 2-RU version incorporates SSD technology, which saves space and creates higher reliability. RTM 3G is used for short- or long-term quality monitoring of live and pre-recorded 3Gbps content to detect subtle or intermittent errors. With RTM 3G, users can test the quality of any delivered service they deploy, either from broadcast interfaces or IP networks. RTM 3G features DMOS, a full-resolution, full-reference-quality human perceptual measurement performed in real time. DMOS allows users to view a channel’s quality without the complexity of setting up one or more recordings first. When video or audio runs outside of preset quality, RTM 3G will automatically record the unacceptable clips and log the quality scores.

Video Clarity’s RTM goes compact
Video Clarity will showcase a smaller, lighter, rack-mountable version of its RTM 3G real-time monitoring device. This new portable 2-RU version incorporates SSD technology, which saves space and creates higher reliability. RTM 3G is used for short- or long-term quality monitoring of live and pre-recorded 3Gbps content to detect subtle or intermittent errors. With RTM 3G, users can test the quality of any delivered service they deploy, either from broadcast interfaces or IP networks. RTM 3G features DMOS, a full-resolution, full-reference-quality human perceptual measurement performed in real time. DMOS allows users to view a channel’s quality without the complexity of setting up one or more recordings first. When video or audio runs outside of preset quality, RTM 3G will automatically record the unacceptable clips and log the quality scores.

Digigram’s audio over IP offering
Digigram will release its iQIOYA *SERV/LINK multichannel IP audio codec in a new 1U unit that supports up to 64 stereo channels – an industry first. With this upgrade, Digigram provides a more compact audio-over-IP solution that enables users to send multiple audio programmes simultaneously to a variety of destinations – such as FM transmitters, a DVB/ cable operator or web radio CDNs – using a single piece of equipment.

Just one-third the size of preceding IOQIA *SERV/LINK models, Digigram’s newly upgraded model is available with analogue and AES3/EBU I/O (up to eight stereo analogue (L/O), AES/EBU-only (L/O up to 16 stereo analogue (L/O) or MADI I/O up to 44 stereo analogue (L/O)). The product also features up to 16 RS-232 ports and 16 GPIOs for auxiliary data tunnelling.

www.calrec.com

www.bluebellcommss.co.uk

www.eyevis.de

www.videoclarity.com

www.digigram.com

www.iZotope.com

www.videoclarity.com

www.cobaltdigital.com

www.eyevis.de

www.cubedigital.com
**NexGuard’s forensic watermarking**

NexGuard, a Civolution company, will demonstrate watermarking solutions that meet the most pressing security concerns of the media and content industries across digital cinema, pre-release, pay TV, live sports and online in SD, HD and 4K.

On-stand demonstrations will include: subscriber-level watermarking for Premium VOD and 4K – the demonstration will showcase how operators can meet the content protection requirements of Hollywood studios; subscriber-level watermarking for live sports – showing how to trace and take down the source of illegally distributed streams while the sports event is in progress and protect broadcasters’ and operators’ investment in premium sports rights and watermarking for e-screens and pre-release – on-stand demonstrations will show broadcasters and operators how NexGuard fits into their 4K-ready or cloud workflows.

**EBS’ Pawa powers EPG**

TV data service provider EBS will showcase its Pawa software at this year’s IBC. Pawa provides a multi-platform, multi-territory, scalable software solution that enables linear and non-linear EPG data to be aggregated, restructured and delivered to any platform. As demand for content continues to increase, the role of the EPG has grown. When channels and platforms need to aggregate and supply data for the EPG, there is a ‘create-once-distribute-many-times’ approach. Paws accommodates the full range of distribution requirements needed by today’s broadcast professionals, enabling them to fully control the EPG data workflow, using a system that can drive both linear and non-linear data via a single database.

**Broadpeak unravels origin server**

Broadpeak will broaden its offering to content providers and operators with the launch of a new origin server. The next-generation origin server strengthens Broadpeak’s range of technologies for content providers beyond umbrellaCDN.

Broadpeak’s CDN selection solution, umbrellaCDN, is available both as a service and as a product, allowing content providers to always choose the most adapted CDN for delivering video content. It has a variety of features, including the ability to display GoS information coming from players while providing detailed analytics and real-time audience data.

**Quantum’s Q-Cloud leap**

Quantum Q-Cloud Archive extends SterNeX workflow capabilities to the cloud, allowing end-to-end SterNeX environments to leverage cloud storage fully with no additional hardware, separate applications or programming, while maintaining full compatibility with existing software applications. Q-Cloud Archive adds off-site cloud archiving of content to SterNeX workflows. Users buy only the capacity they need and as they need it, keeping assets archived long-term for re-monetisation or simply as an off-site asset pool.

Unlike other archive solutions that require complex set-up, third-party gateways or unfamiliar software, Q-Cloud Archive works seamlessly with existing workflows. Users don’t have to worry about application compatibility or a learning curve.

**Thomson Video Networks boosts efficiency**

Thomson Video Networks with NUGEN Audio has developed a range of proprietary new processes for upmixing stereo audio to 5.1/7.1 surround in TV and film productions. The fist NUGEN Audio product to include this new technology will be Halo Upmix, which is designed to create a stereo-to-5.1/7.1 downmix-compatible upmix with optional dialogue isolation in the centre channel. Halo Upmix will be available in Avid AAX, YST and AAF formats. Serving an ever-expanding array of professional loudness management applications, NUGEN Audio will introduce LeqNt measurement into the range of its existing solutions. Support of LeqNt provides mission-critical capabilities for audio professionals.

**Cobham goes SOLO**

The SOLO8 SDR is a dual-input HD-SDI COFDM transmitter with integral video analytics, recording and IP streaming. The transmitter includes 1280B of internal video storage, USB and Ethernet 10/100 interfaces, an integrated ISM band telemetry modem; and an integral battery-backed, real-time clock for time and date stamp.

**Rascular spots Harmonic partnership**

Rascular will be highlighting its evolving partnership with Harmonic, particularly the use of Helm to control the Harmonic Spectrum media server and Spectrum ChannelPort integrated channel play out systems. This relationship has continued to grow since NAB 2015, with US sales success backed up by ongoing technical advances. The latest integration developments will be on show. RouteMaster is now able to provide complete control of routers across the Bandfind range. Bandfind has quickly become known for its signal-neutral platform that offers many functions and supports numerous different signal formats in one frame. Deploying RouteMaster, users can control an existing router installation from any web browser via computer, tablet and even mobile phones.
When Hollywood is not enough

The pure-play premium OTT market in the Middle East recently saw another entrant in the form of Starz Play Arabia joining the likes of Icflix, OSN Go and a bevy of telco offerings. Meanwhile, rumours abound of the impending arrival of Netflix and the launch of new broadcaster-backed offerings. This is all good news, as competition undoubtedly benefits consumers and drives innovation. However, even at this early stage, it is becoming harder for services to differentiate themselves. Features such as HD streaming and multi-device support may have been enticing in the past, but they are now expected to be standard. Thus, the competing services have three primary competitive levers: price, content and convenience.

It is a safe assumption that a price war in a business that relies on volume rather than margin is a race to the bottom and best avoided unless one has deep pockets and a propensity to ignore commercial realities, but changing it is not always easy, due to the need to protect the US market or other international distribution commitments. Thus, ardent fans of a particular title would watch it in the pay-window or download it illegally shortly after its US broadcast. For everyone else, the content is free on PTA channels.

Television ratings indicate drama is the most popular genre, and time and time again, consumer surveys show that Arabic is, by far, the preferred language for drama series to be watched in. Although dubbing might work for a Turkish series because the locations and actors don’t seem too distant, dubbing becomes much less convincing when the characters and settings are obviously foreign. We come to the unsurprising conclusion that Arabic dramas content is of course, the weapon of choice in this fight. And here again, consumer surveys show that Arabic drama content is key to success. Even more almighty would be an OTT player’s ability to offer original content outside the Ramadan window. But simply taking a page from the book of Netflix and producing original content in sufficient volume to convince people to part with their money is not viable for all players. It takes significant production and marketing budgets to produce and promote content that appeals to the various markets within the Middle East. Relaying purely on library content is not a competing offering for Middle East consumers. Licensing a first (Ramadan) or second (post-Ramadan) run of an Arabic drama series would allow OTT players to play their other trump card: binge viewing convenience. An OTT player offering all 30 episodes of a drama on day one of Ramadan would create a new viewing experience for viewers. Similarly, offering exclusive Arabic dramas for binge viewing immediately after Ramadan would free viewers from the shackles of TV schedules. Since it is customary for licensors of first and second windows of Arabic dramas to be granted a multi-year third run (library) window, an OTT player would still be able to maintain a broad long-tail offering.

The OTT player that can offer a large selection of exclusive Arabic series, available from the first day of Ramadan or the post-Ramadan window for binge viewing, would certainly have a tempting proposition for subscribers in the Middle East.

Kamir Sarkis is CEO at Sync Media FZ LLC.
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RED Weapon is the evolution of the DSMC camera body concept. The camera is smaller, lighter, and more powerful than before. Additionally, this has opened up possibilities by making Weapon modules much more compact.

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